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Northern Territories of the Sasanian Atropatene and the Arab Azerbaijan*

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Abstract

This paper reviews the administrative and political map of South-Eastern Caucasus and North-Western Iran under the Sasanian (227–651 A.D.), Umayyad (661–750 A.D.), and early ‘Abbasid (750–1258 A.D.) domination based on the Classical Armenian, Arabic and Persian primary sources. It is an attempt to specify and describe the northern territories of Atropatene-Azerbaijan in the 3rd–9th centuries.

Keywords

Azerbaijan, Caucasian *Kust* of Sasanian Iran, Iranian *Marzpanate* of Ādurbādagān, Arab Province of Aḍarbayğān

Since 1918 on the political map of South-Eastern Caucasus a sovereign state has emerged named *the Republic of Azerbaijan* with capital in Baku. Later, the largest ethnic component of this political entity was officially named *Azerbaijanis* (before 1937 the ethnonym *Caucasian* or *Caspian Tatars* or *Türks* was used; since 1992–1993—*Türks*), which spoke the Azerbaijani-Turkish language and adhered to Shiite Islam. Meanwhile, on the administrative map of North-Western Iran two *ostans* (provinces) have been formed: one is called Western Azerbaijan¹ centred in Urmia, the se-

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¹ The country name *Azerbaijan* is the Arabised form of Middle Persian toponym *Ādurbādagān* or *Āḍarbāyagān*. It goes back to Parthian *Āturpātākān* (Gr. Ἀτροπατηνή, Middle Gr. Ἀδραβιγῶν, Arm. Ատրպատական), which derives from the name of the last Achaemenid satrap of Media, Atropates (Āturpāt) who, after the death of Alexander III of Macedon

cond—Eastern Azerbaijan with capital in Tabriz. Furthermore, in 1993 two other *ostans* were formed, named Ardabil and Zanzan, which were detached from Eastern Azerbaijan province of Iran and were mainly inhabited by Iranian Turcophones.

Due to political expediency, the enlisted four *ostans* of Iran are usually named the *Iranian* or *Southern Azerbaijan*, impelling by that the existence of a *Northern Azerbaijan*, i.e. the Azerbaijan Republic in the South Caucasus. Given that the majority of the population in the both sides of the Araxes River are Turkophones, the Soviet Azerbaijani historiography of the second half of the 20th century proposed a new version of ethno-political history of the region claiming that the so-called *Northern Azerbaijan* has existed since early Middle Ages.

In the full edition of Ancient Armenian geographical treatise Աշխարհացայգ [Ašxarhac'oyc'] we see Ēranšahr (Iran) divided into four *k'usts* (MPers. *kust(ag)*, lit. “side”, meaning “vicerealty”): Xorasan (i.e. Xorbaran, MPers. Xwarbarān) in the west, Nmrroj (MPers. Nēmrož) in the south, Xorasan (MPers. Xwarāsān) in the east, and Kapkoh or the Caucasus in the north (Harutyunyan 2003: 2157).² The same four *kusts* are described in the Pahlavi text *Šahrestānīhā-ī Ērān(šahr)* by an anonymous author of the first half of the 7th century with only difference that the northern *kust* is marked with a term *Ādurbādagān* (Xuršudyan 2010: 116–125, 112–116).

Arab-speaking historian of Iranian descent ad-Dīnawarī (d. around 895 A.D.) in his كتاب الأخبار الطوال (*Book of the Long Traditions*) states that it was king Kisrā Anūshirwān, known as Khosrov I Anushirwan (531–579 A.D.), who “...divided the country into four quarters, and each was ruled by one ruler” (Guirgass 1888: 69). But according to multi-volume chronicles تاريخ الرسل والملوك (*History of the Prophets and Kings*) by another Arab-

in 323 B.C., proclaimed his own independent state in the north of Media. Atropates' descendants reigned here with the Persian title *šāh* (“king”) up to 6 B.C. Then, the Arsacids who ruled in Parthia (238 B.C.–224 A.D.) would enthrone in Āturpātākān a representative of their dynasty and in 78 A.D. would even annex the kingdom. When the Sasanians took the power in Iran in 227 A.D., a *marzpanate* (an administrative unit like province; from MPers. *marz* “boundary, border”, *marzpān* “warden of the borders, margrave”) named *Ādurbādagān* was formed.

² The Armenian author enlisted 67 regions in the whole Ēranšahr (Iran) 13 of which are in the interesting for us Kapkoh (Caucasus).

speaking Persian, aṭ-Ṭabarī (838–923 A.D.), having ascended the throne, Kistrā (Khosrov) only “sent messages to four *fādūs-fāns* who ruled in four parts of Fārs”. Moreover, apart from *fādūs-fāns* (MPers. *pāy-gōspān*), that is viceroys, the author refers to military leaders called *išbahbad* (MPers. *spāhbed*) who were appointed to each *kust* (de Goeje 1879–1881: 892–894). Hence, it may be well perceived that such administrative division of Sasanian Iran had appeared long before Khosrov I, and the military power was separated from civil administration.³

Kusts were divided into *marzpanates* and *šahres*. It has been well established by historians that under the Sasanians, Persian Armenia, two countries in Southern Caucasus (Albania-Aḫuank' and Iberia-K'art'li), and Atropatene were separate *marzpanates* of the Caucasian *kust* with the centre in Ganzag⁴ (see Christensen 1944: 370; Eremyan 1958: 219).

According to *Ašxarhac'oyc', K'usti Kapkoḱ'* (Caucasian *k'ust*) consisted of nine *ašxarhs* (*šahrs*): “Atrpatakan, Rē, Gelan, Mukan, Dilumn, Ahmadan, Dambvar, Taparastan, Amawḷ, Rowan, <... and> has many cities; [the biggest] is Ganjak šahastan” (Harutyunyan 2003: 2173–2174). But in another edition of this manuscript we read: “K'ust Kapkoh ... consists of thirteen *ašxarhs*: Atrpatakan, Armn [that is] Hayk', Varjan, that is Virk', Rān that is Aḫuank', Balasakan, Sisakan, Arē, Gelan, Šančan, Dlmunk', Dmbawand, Taprēstan, Rwan and Aml ...” (ibid.: 2157).⁵

However, in the abridged edition of *Ašxarhac'oyc'* all the Christian countries and regions of the Caucasian *k'ust*, namely Armn-Hayk' (Armenia), Varjan-Virk' (Iberia), (A)ṛan-Aḫuank' (Albania), Sisakan and Balasakan, are not mentioned.⁶ In the meantime, it is clearly stated that the

³ It would be interesting to note that the chapters, omitted in the classical edition of Ibn al-Faḡīh's *مختصر كتاب البلدان* (*Concise Book of Lands*), contain the stories where this Arab-speaking geographer in 290 AH (902/3 A.D.) quotes Ancient Persian authors, who saw the world as divided into four parts, one of which constituted Persia (Žamkoč'yan 1979: 70–71).

⁴ Located in the south-eastern areas of Lake Urmia.

⁵ According to the text, the Caucasian *k'ust* was purported to be consisted of 13 *šahrs* but enlisted were 14!! — the separation of Sisakan, i.e. Siwnik', from *marzpanate* of Armenia took place in 571 A.D.

⁶ We can find these Christian countries and regions of the Caucasian *k'ust* enlisted in the same order in Syrian *Chronicles* by Zacharias the Rhetorician or Mitilenian dating back to 560s (see Pigulevskaya 2011: 594–595).

Greater Armenia was not a part of this viceroyalty and only bordered it in the west. Finally, of the three greatest lakes of Armenian plateau, the short edition mentions only Kaputan (Urmia) the southeastern coast of which belonged to Iranian *marzpanate* of Ādurbādagān.

The abovementioned statements indicate that before the inclusion of the most part of the territory of Greater Armenia and adjacent Christian states of Albania and Iberia into the Sasanian Iran in 387 A.D., the Caucasian *kust* might have already existed since the formation of the Sasanian Empire (see Šaginyan 2011: 44–45). Initially, it included the *marzpanate* of Ādurbādagān centred in Ganzag, inhabited predominantly by the Western-Iranian ethnic groups practicing Zoroastrianism (Aliev 1989: 5–43, 116–130; Kasumova 1993: 37–48, 83–100). All these assumptions fit well with the facts obtained from the primary sources. For instance, in *Šahrestānīhā-ī Ērān(šahr)*, the *kust Kapkōh* is noted as *Ādurbādagān*; an inscription by the *marzpan* of Ādurbādagān, Barzinš, dating 553 A.D. is found on the walls of Darband (Derbent), the Caucasian avant-poste of the Sasanians (Paxomov 1929: 19). And finally, Ibn Ḥurdādbih, in 885 points out: “...iṣbahbaḍ of the north (i.e. Kapkōh) in the times of Persians (i.e. Sasanians) was called Ādarbād̄kān iṣbahbaḍ” (de Goeje 1889a: 118).⁷

By combining newly-conquered Christian states of Persian Armenia, Caucasian Albania and Iberia with Zoroastrian *marzpanate* of Ādurbādagān⁸ and establishing the united Caucasian *kust*, apart from military and political purposes, Sasanian authorities could have pursued other goals as well.⁹ Namely, as early as in the middle of the 5th century A.D., they tried to spread their state religion, Zoroastrianism, among the Christian peoples of the Caucasian *kust*—Armenians, Albanians, and Iberians (see for details Yuzbašyan 2001: 44–91).

After the elimination of the royal power in Persian Armenia in 428 A.D. by the Sasanians, not all eastern *ašxarhs* of it were included in the newly formed *marzpanate* centred in Dvin. In the full edition of *Ašxar-*

⁷ The same and almost in the same words is repeated by the prominent Muslim historian and geographer from Khorasan al-Ya‘qūbī (d. in 897) (Houtsma 1883: 203–204).

⁸ Zoroastrianism in Ādurbādagān was rooted since ancient times; the sanctuary of fire in Ganzak, according to the legend, was built by Zoroaster himself.

⁹ They meant provision of security of north-western borders from invasion of nomadic Khazars, Huns, and Alans.

hac'oyc', the articles dedicated to southeastern *ašxarhs* of Parskahayk¹⁰ and P'aytakaran,¹¹ indicate that now those provinces of Greater Armenia are included in Atrpatakan (Harutyunyan 2003: 2153), i.e. *marzpanate* of Ādurbādagān. Meanwhile, the articles on two other *ašxarhs* of Greater Armenia, Arc'ax and Utik', located in the north-east of the country, between the rivers Araxes and Kura, are told to be part of Aḥuank' (Harutyunyan 2003: 2153, 2172), i.e. the *marzpanate* of Arrān.

The *marzpanate* of Ādurbādagān was expanded further into the north in 571 A.D. by annexing Greater-Armenian *ašxarh* of Siwnik' (cf. Sebēos, apud Abgaryan 1979:67–68).

We believe that the inclusion of Siwnik' into Ādurbādagān automatically resulted in the accession of three other eastern *gavar's* (districts) of Greater-Armenian *ašxarh* of Vaspurakan situated on the right bank of the Middle Araxes: Bak'(r)an or Marand, Gabit'ean and Parspatunik'. Though ancient Armenian authors do not mention this, it was apparently essential in terms of geographical location of these regions between Greater-Armenian *ašxarh* of Siwnik' and *marzpanate* of Ādurbādagān. Moreover, according to the chronicle of the Armenian historian from Utik' (Right-bank Arrān), Anonymous Kaḥankatuac'i (second half of the 7th c.), during his Persian campaign of 623 A.D. Byzantine emperor Heraclius I (610–641) had to cross Persian Armenia across the river Erasx (i.e. Araxes) in order to get the country of Media (i.e. Ādurbādagān) (apud Hakobyan 2005: 378).

Unfortunately, *Ašxarhac'oyc'* lacks a detailed description of territories and borders of the *marzpanate* of Ādurbādagān. On the other hand, its 26th article provides a thorough account of the territories and borders of the (*marzpanate*) of Arrān: "Aḥbania, that is Aḥuank' [is located] to the east of Iveria and borders [in the north] with Sarmatia by the Caucasian [ridge and] is washed [in the east] by the Kasbian Sea, and borders [in the south-west] with [Persian] Armenia by the river Kura. <...> [Aḥbania] is

¹⁰ According to this text, Parskahayk' with the cities of Hēr and Ormi occupied the territory between the ridge Kotur-Zagross and the western coast of Lake Kaputan (Urmia).

¹¹ *Ašxarhac'oyc'* says that P'aytakaran with the cities of Vardanakert and Bagawan was located on the right bank of the Lower Araxes and Lower Kura and washed by Khazar (Caspian) sea.

comprised of the following gavaʾrs: Exni, Bex, Kʼambēčan, Šakʼē, Ostan-i Marčpan, Dašt-i Balasakan. Besides, it includes the gavaʾrs detached from Armenia: Šikašēn, Gardman, Kołtʼ, Zawē—totally twenty *gavaʾrs* [of Arcʼax and Utikʼ], located between the rivers of Araxes and Kura” (Harutyunyan 2003: 2171).

Thus, the *marzpanate* of Arrān was expanded at the expense of Greater Armenian *ašxarhs* of Arcʼax and Utikʼ. According to Movsēs Dasxurancʼi (10th c.), it was due to the frequent Khazar incursions in the beginning of the Armenian chronology (i.e. after July 11, 551 A.D.) that residences of both the Catholicos of Ałuankʼ and *marzpan* of Arrān were moved from Čʼoła near the Caspian littoral to the city of Partaw on the right bank of the Kura (Hovhannisyan 2012: 163–164).

Hence, the *marzpanate* of Arrān occupied a vast territory between the eastern extremity of the main Caucasian ridge in the north and the lower courses of Araxes and Kura in the South. In general, it corresponded to the territory of the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan (for further details, see Hakobyan 1987: 109–124).

Meanwhile, the *marzpanate* of Ādurbādagān occupied the region to the south of Arrān, which is the territory of four contemporary ostan of Iran: Western Azerbaijan, Eastern Azerbaijan, Ardabil, and Zanjan. The border between the two *marzpanates* went along the lower courses of Araxes and Kura. After inclusion of Siwnikʼ into Ādurbādagān in 571 A.D., the western border between these *marzpanates* passed through Sevan and Arcʼax ridges.

After the fall of Sasanian Empire in 651 A.D., according to Sebēos, “Siwnikʼ,... which became part of Persian kingdom earlier, after the Arab domination, was united with Armenia” (Abgaryan 1979: 175). Consequently, the border between Ādurbādagān and Arrān after 651 was restored to the state of 571 but this time as a state frontier and not an administrative border between two *marzpanates*.

Noteworthy is that Iranian *marzpanates* of Ādurbādagān and Arrān, according to Muslim historian al-Balāḍurī (d. in 892), were conquered in different periods. Aḍarbayğān (Ādurbādagān), for instance, was invaded as early as in 22 AH (642/3 A.D.) (de Goeje 1866: 325–326), while the conquest of Ałuankʼ, Greater-Armenia and Iberia delayed for many decades up until 701. Moreover, al-Balāḍurī states that “...as soon as Arabs cap-

tured Ađarbajğān, many of their tribes rushed into there”. The resettlers were authorised to “...convert the local population into Islam” (de Goeje 1866: 328, 329).

The Mediaeval Arabo-Muslim historiography attributes a number of changes, including an administrative reform, to caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705). Thus, during the reign of the first caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty, the system of 9 *vilayets* (viceroyalties) was introduced, which in late 8th century was reorganised into five bigger ones, each comprised of several provinces denoted mainly by the term *kūra* (from Middle Gr. *χωρα* “side, region”).

The Northern *vilayet*¹² included the province of Armīniya (Arab. أرمنية) centred in Dabīl (Dvin) and composed of the most of Greater Armenia (Arab. أرمنية [Armīniya]), the whole Albania-Ałuank’ (Arab. اران [Arrān]) and Iberia-K’art’li (Arab. جرجان [Ġurzān]). It also included the province of Ađarbajğān (Arab. أنربيجان) with the centre in Marağa and the province of al-Ğazīra (Arab. الجزيرة) in Upper Mesopotamia with the centre in al-Mawṣil (Shaginyan 2008: 68–85; idem 2010: 319–328; idem 2011: 338–357). This shows that the Arab *vilayet* was almost twice as big as the Caucasian *kust* of Sasanian Iran.

Thus, the former Iranian *marzpanate* of Ādurbādagān became a separate province under the Arabised name of Ađarbajğān with the centre in Marağa and was included into the Northern *vilayet* of the Arab caliphate. Meanwhile, the former *marzpanate* of Arrān with the same name centred in Barḍa’a (Partaw) became part of the adjoining province of Armīniya. Muslim sources have recorded much data about the territories and borders of both provinces of the Northern *vilayet*. Of special interest is the description of the province of Ađarbajğān. Persian geographer and traveller al-Iṣṭaḥrī (d. in 951/2) described its borders in greater detail: “The chain of mountains, which stretches from the extreme of aṭ-Ṭarm and up to Zanğān; then it touches the edges of ad-Dīnawa; then stretches behind Ḥulwān and Šahrazūr until it approaches the Diğla (Tigris), and then encircles the limits (of the province) of Armīniya” (de Goeje 1870: 190–191). A

¹² In the first geographical works by Muslim writers of the 9th c. (Ibn Ḥurdābih and al-Ya’qūbī) this viceroyalty is marked by Arabised form الجربي [al-Ġarbī] of the Syriac term *garbia*, lit. “north” (see de Goeje 1889a: 118; idem 1892b: 290).

compilative geographic account prepared circa 290 AH (902/3 A.D.) by Ibn al-Faḡih, concretises the northern limits of Aḡarbayğān: “Borders of Aḡarbayğān (in the north) go along the (river) ar-Ras (Araxes)...” (de Goeje 1885: 296). Ibn Ḥurdādbih has retained the full list of the cities of Aḡarbayğān: “Ardabīl, Bāğarvān (Bagawan), Balwānkiṛğ, Barza, Barzand,¹³ Ġābrawān, Ġanza (Ganzag), Ḥuwayy (Hēr), Kūlsarah, al-Marāğa, Marand, al-Mayāniğ, Mūqān, Narīz, Sāburhāst, Salmās(t),¹⁴ Sīsar, aš-Šīz, Tabrīz, Urmīya (Ormi), and Wartān (Vardanakert)” (de Goeje 1889a: 119–120). Furthermore, he points out that the city of ...Wartān¹⁵ is the last point of the province of Aḡarbayğān.

The full list of the cities of the province of Aḡarbayğān with their brief characteristics is given also by al-Balāḡdurī (see de Goeje 1866: 325–331). Then, the biggest cities of Aḡarbayğān are enlisted by Muslim geographers of the 10th century, Qudāma and Ibn Rustah (see de Goeje 1889b: 244; de Goeje 1892a: 106). The data on these urban centres indicate that the Arab province of Aḡarbayğān still incorporated south-eastern *ašxarhs* of historical Greater Armenia, as well as Parskahayk', P'aytakaran and the three eastern *gavar's* of Vaspurakan, which were located on the right bank of the Middle Araxes. It is noteworthy that Arab historian al-Kūfi (d. around 926) quotes a brief report, which can to some extent shed light on the ethnic landscape of these areas in the late 9th and 10th centuries. According to him, Marwān bin Muḥammad (693–710), in 123 AH (740/1 A.D.), during his campaign to Mūqān in Aḡarbayğān and the adjacent province of Ġīlān, subdued the whole Aḡarbayğān — “lands on which Armenians live” (Khan 1389-1395: 82). Besides, as al-Muqaddasī (946/7-1000 A.D.) witnesses, the city of Barzand, mentioned in the list of the cities of Aḡarbayğān, “is an insignificant trade town of Armenians” (de Goeje 1877: 378).

¹³ Appeared under the Arab domination to the south from the place of junction of the Kura and the Araxes, that is within the limits of historical Greater-Armenian *ašxarh* of P'aytakaran.

¹⁴ Appeared in the conditions of Arabian power to the north-west from the coast of Lake Urmia, that is within the limits of historical Greater-Armenian *ašxarh* of Parskahayk'.

¹⁵ The city of Wartān, historically Vardanakert, was the centre of the *gavar* with the same name in the *ašxarh* of P'aytakaran. It was located on the right bank of the Lower Araxes (Harutyunyan 2003: 2153, 2172).

Thus, native Armenian population remained the major ethnic group of these lands, incorporated in Aḍarbayğān, at least up until the middle of the 10th century. This thesis can be supported also by the full list of the domains of the Arcruni house of the late 10th century, recorded in *Պատմութիւն տանն Արծրունեաց* (*History of the Arcrunid's House*) by T'ovma Arcruni, touching upon the three *gava's* of Parskahayk' — Өñay, Zarehawan and Tambēr (Vardanyan 1985: 390, 391), as well as by the full lists of episcopacies of the Armenian Church, which were at the disposal of the Armenian bishop of Byzantine Sebastia, Uxtanēs (near 970–985), and the Catholicos-Patriarch of Syrian Jacobite church, Mikhail I the Great (1166–1199). They latter mention three dioceses of the Armenian Church that were located in various *gava's* of Parskahayk' — Zarawand and Her (diocese of Erutakk'), Өñay, Zarehawan and Tambēr (diocese of Zarehawank'), Ayli/Kuričan (diocese of Ēli) (Hovhannisyan/Madoyan 2012: 503; Chabot 1901: 457, 459–460). Finally, in the middle of the 10th century, while travelling through Aḍarbayğān, a native of al-Ğazīra, Ibn Ḥauqal saw how in Marand the people make Armenian seats and carpets. In adjacent Armīniya he came across with Armenian lacings produced in Salmas “and imported here [from Aḍarbayğān]” (de Goeje 1873: 246, 247, 248).

The abovementioned list of the cities of Aḍarbayğān also proves that the territory of this Arab province roughly coincided with the territory of the four enlisted *ostans* on the modern administrative map of Iran.

Unbiased historical study based on primary sources and relevant methodology by many scholars have asserted that since 22–276 AH (642/3–889/90 A.D.) within Arab Caliphate there was one administrative unit under the name of “Aḍarbayğān”, approximately covering the territory of those four ostans of Iran (see, e.g. Minorsky 1986; Boswarth 1989). Furthermore, it is clearly evident that under the Arab domination Caucasian Albania (Arrān), was included into the adjacent province of Armīniya (701–886)¹⁶ and had nothing in common both politically and administra-

¹⁶ The province of Armīniya *de-facto* ceased to exist as early as in 860s, when in its Caspian part independent Arab-Muslim emirates Širwān (Mazyadids, 799–1027) and Bāb al-Abwāb (Hāšimids, 869–1077) were formed, and the Great Principedom of Armenia (826) received more autonomy. But *de-jure* the province of Armīniya would stop its existence only in 886, when caliph al-Mu'tamid (870–892) was forced to recognise the independent kingdom of Armenian Bagratids (886–1045) (for details, see Shaginyan 2009: 213–223).

tively with the province of Aḍarbayğān.¹⁷ As Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī ar-Rumī (1179–1229) states: “Between Aḍarbayğān and Arrān a river flows named Arras (Araxes). Everything to the west and to the north of this river belongs to Arrān; what is to the east and (to the south)—to Aḍarbayğān” (Buniyatov/Žuze 1983: 10).

As Z. M. Buniyatov (1965:142) writes about the northern *vilayet*: “Arabs often united three countries —Azerbaijan, Arran and Armenia in one administrative unit and formed one province named sometimes *Armīniya* and sometimes *Azerbaijan*”. As already mentioned, the Umayyads, definitely, united these and other countries of the region in a single *vilayet* of the North. However, within that *vilayet* both *Armīniya* and Aḍarbayğān were separate administrative units (provinces) with distinct borders.

Buniyatov states that “under the ‘Abbasids, especially during the reign of Harun ar-Rašid, both Azerbaijan and Arran were *vilayets* with well-established frontiers” (Buniyatov 1965: 144). The sole but very important correction to this statement is that Albania was incorporated in *Armīniya* and in terms of political administration it was never (under the Arab domination) acknowledged as equal to provinces like *Armīniya* or Aḍarbayğān.

The province of *Armīniya* consisted of three administrative units, one of which named “*Armīniya II*” with the centre in Barḍa‘a (Partaw), coincided with the territory of the former *marzpanate* of Arrān. Moreover, according to Muslim historians and geographers, as-Sisağān (Sisakan-Siwnik‘) was also part of it and, as mentioned above, from 571 to 651 this Greater-Armenian *ašxarh* was part of the *marzpanate* of Ādurbādagān. It could become part of “*Armīniya II*” in 186 of Armenian era (737/8 A.D.)

¹⁷ It has nothing in common also with early mediaeval Atropatene-Azerbaijan both in ethnical and confessional sense. As opposed to it where prevailing was Western-Iranian ethnic element who practiced Zoroastrianism and was converted into Islam under Arab domination, in Albania prevailing (on the left bank of Kura) were Eastern Caucasian ethnic groups who had been practicing Christianity since the early 4th c. and were only partially Islamicised by Arabs since the end of the 8th c. The direct descendants of Caucasian Albanians are Udins who reside compactly in the north of the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan and practice the so-called “Armenian Christianity”, i.e. the official dogma of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

(for details on “Armīniya II”, see Shaginyan 2008: 68–85; idem 2010: 319–328; idem 2011: 338–357).

Thus, the northern territories of the early mediaeval, mainly Iranian-speaking, Atropatene-Azerbaijan (Zoroastrian under the Sasanians and Islamic under the Arab domination) were comprised of Greater-Armenian *ašxarhes* of Parskahayk' and P'aytakaran, as well as the three eastern *gavar's* of the *ašxarh* of Vaspurakan situated to the south from Middle Araxes. Hence, the northern borders of Atropatene-Azerbaijan passed along the lower course of Araxes and Kura with only exception during the period of 571–651 when Greater-Armenian *ašxarh* of Siwnik' temporarily became part of the *marzpanate* of Ādurbādagān. To the north of Araxes and Kura within South-Eastern Caucasus, as well as between these rivers was located Christian Albania-Aḫuank', an administrative unit named “Arrān” under the Sasanid and Arab domination, inhabited mainly by Eastern-Caucasian tribes on the left bank of Kura and Indo-European Armenians on the right bank.¹⁸

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¹⁸ According to al-Iṣṭaḥrī, “the way from Bardā'a to Dabil (Duin) lies through the lands of Armenians...” (de Goeje 1870: 194).

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